

CHAIR

FRANCINE

BERGER

2009

DR. ALAN  
MICHAEL

PISANO  
SELIB

2011  
2012

## Mission

The Broadband Monitoring Committee monitors Comcast's and RCN's compliance with the provisions of their licenses to operate cable television franchises in Brookline.

## Background

A 15-year license to operate a cable television (CATV) franchise in Brookline was awarded to Times Mirror by the Board of Selectmen (the Issuing Authority) in June of 1982. In 1983 that license was transferred to Cablevision of Brookline (Cablevision Systems Corporation). In early 1984 the Board of Selectmen created the CATV Monitoring Committee to monitor Cablevision's adherence to the license. That same year the Board of Selectmen also appointed Director of Human Relations-Youth Resources Stephen Bressler to serve as Ombudsman for CATV and to staff the CATV Monitoring Committee.

In 1997 Cablevision of Brookline's license was renewed for five years. In 2001 the license held by Cablevision of Brookline was transferred to AT&T Broadband and was scheduled to expire the following year. In 2002 the license was extended for three years. During 2002 Comcast made a takeover bid for AT&T Broadband.

## Comcast

In 2003 the Board of Selectmen approved the transfer of the license from AT&T Broadband to Comcast.

A memorandum of understanding between the Town and Comcast provided for a Comcast-funded study of their system, primarily to determine the cause of ingress on local broadcast channels, and to investigate audio variability on all channels. Consultant William Pohts of Alexandria, Virginia, spent several weeks in the town over the course of 2003 visiting homes of Comcast subscribers as well as various Comcast facilities, taking measurements and readings of signals and analyzing the results. Mr. Pohts presented a four volume report to the Town at a License Renewal Ascertainment Hearing on April 29, 2004, indicating problems that existed and that needed to be addressed by Comcast.

During the period 1982 to date the Board of Selectmen as Issuing Authority approved amendments to the Cablevision/AT&T Broadband/Comcast licenses to reflect emerging needs of the town and changes in the cable television business.

In 2003 Comcast took over the studio facility at 179 Amory Street and forced Brookline Access Television to leave so that the Comcast channel CN8 could have full use of the property. Brookline Access Television moved over to the Old Lincoln School, where it remained until it could move into a state-of-the-art facility it constructed on the top floor at the Unified Arts Building at 46 Tappan Street in the fall of 2009. In 2008 CN8 was closed down.

A federally-mandated three year license renewal process between the Town and Comcast concluded in 2005, with the Town denying renewal. Negotiations then commenced between the Town and Comcast to resolve differences. A Cable Television Renewal License between the Town of Brookline and Comcast was finally granted effective May 1, 2006 and will expire on April 30, 2016.

Comcast provides digital cable television (converter box required), video on demand, high definition television, high speed data service (Internet access), and telephone service. Brookline residents may contact Comcast for sales and customer service at 617-731-1343 or [www.comcast.com](http://www.comcast.com)

. Residents who are hearing impaired should use the Massachusetts Telephone Relay Service (711) to contact Comcast. Comcast does not maintain a customer service office in the town.

## **RCN**

In 1998, at the behest of town residents wanting cable television provider competition, and because there were services such as high speed data (Internet access) that were not being offered by Cablevision of Brookline at that time, the Board of Selectmen awarded a ten-year license to operate a cable television franchise to RCN. The federally-mandated three-year license renewal process with RCN began in April 2005. Negotiations concluded with a new ten-year Renewal License being issued on April 28, 2008, expiring in 2018.

During 2008 RCN migrated all of their analog signals to digital. All RCN customers must use a converter box for all tiers of service.

RCN provides video on demand, high definition television, high speed data service (Internet access), and telephone service. Brookline residents may contact RCN for sales and customer service at 1-800-746-4726 or [www.rcn.com/boston/](http://www.rcn.com/boston/). Residents who are hearing impaired

should use the Massachusetts Telephone Relay Service (711) to contact RCN. RCN does not maintain a customer service office in the town.

## WiFi

Galaxy Internet Services provides wireless Internet connection service in Brookline. For more information go to [www.brooklinewireless.com](http://www.brooklinewireless.com) or call 617-219-1382. The Ombudsman will take calls regarding problems with Galaxy.

## Satellite Television

Satellite television providers are not required to have a license granted by the Town. The Town does not oversee satellite service providers, nor does the Ombudsman take complaints about satellite television problems.

## FiOS

Through 2009 Verizon had chosen not to provide FiOS service in Brookline. By the close of 2009 Verizon had not given any indication that it would be providing FiOS service during 2010. At a State House public hearing on July 22 numerous municipal officials complained that Verizon refused to provide FiOS service in their communities.

## From CATV to Broadband

In 2000, the Board of Selectmen broadened the CATV Monitoring Committee's mandate and changed its name to the Broadband Monitoring Committee.

## Membership

In 2009, Fran Berger continued as Broadband Monitoring Committee Chair with Stephen Bressler serving as Secretary. Other members on the Committee were Dr. Alan Pisano and Michael Selib.

## Administration

The Committee received staff and budgetary support through the Human Relations-Youth Resources Commission. Commission Director Stephen Bressler served as Ombudsman for Cable Television Operations for the Town.

## Ombudsman

In calendar 2009, the Ombudsman handled 174 complaints and/or inquiries relative to CATV and Broadband, up from 168 in 2008. The Ombudsman noted that calls this year related to billing problems, rates, questions concerning senior discounts, downed wires after storms, outages, questions regarding the end of CATV analog service and the migration of analog channels to a digital platform, as well as the 2009 end of over-the-air analog TV and the switchover to digital TV, questions as to when Verizon FiOS will be available in Brookline. The Ombudsman assisted numerous residents in their attempts to apply for over-the-air digital converter boxes.

The Ombudsman was in frequent contact with Comcast and RCN managerial and customer service staff. The Ombudsman also received calls from residents wanting information regarding satellite television and WiFi availability and signal quality issues.

The Ombudsman may be reached at: Stephen Bressler, Ombudsman, Broadband Monitoring Committee, 11 Pierce Street, Brookline, MA 02445 or by telephone at 617-730-2330 voice or 617-730-2327 (TDD) or facsimile 617-730-2388 or by e-mail [sbressler@brooklinema.gov](mailto:sbressler@brooklinema.gov) .

On July 22, 2009 Broadband Monitoring Committee Chair Fran Berger and Ombudsman Stephen Bressler attended a public hearing at the State House on S1531, Verizon's attempt to change the existing process of license negotiations that would impact adversely on a city or town's ability to negotiate a license. Mr. Bressler testified against the bill.

During 2010 the Broadband Monitoring Committee is scheduled to meet on the dates listed below. Meetings are generally held at the Health Department Library, 11 Pierce Street, 2nd floor, from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

### **Schedule of Meetings in 2010**

January 11, 2010

February 22, 2010, 12 Noon at Brookline Access Television

46 Tappan Street, top floor, for tour of studio

March 8, 2010

April 12, 2010

May 10, 2010

June 14, 2010

July 12, 2010 (if needed)

August 9, 2010 (if needed)

September 13, 2010

October 18, 2010

November 8, 2010

December 13, 2010